



## NATIONAL WEATHER SERVICE

# Western Region Notes

January 29, 2004

### REGIONAL DIRECTOR'S OFFICE



*Some of the WRH and WFO Seattle staff gathered for a photo at the conclusion of General Johnson's visit to the forecast office. (L to R) Front row: Bob Tibi (WRH) and Jim Prange (IMET); Second row: Brad Colman (SOO), General Johnson, and Chris Hill (MIC); Back row: Andy Haner (IMET), Danny Mercer (Meteorologist), Kevin Placido (student volunteer), and Mike McFarland (Meteorologist).*

#### General Johnson Visits WFO Seattle:

NOAA National Weather Service Assistant Administrator Brig. Gen. David L. Johnson visited his first forecast office while attending the AMS 2004 Annual Meeting in Seattle. On January 14, WFO Seattle MIC Chris Hill and his team led a series of briefings and demonstrations to highlight their various programs, products, and services. SOO Brad Colman also provided an overview of the equipment and tools used today by NWS meteorologists and hydrologists throughout the nation. WRH's staff chiefs Bob Tibi and Andy Edman provided critical program information and answered questions on my behalf. Congratulations to WFO Seattle for a job well done.

#### Other Activities During AMS:



*Some of those who staffed the NWS exhibit during WeatherFest include (L to R) Tyree Wilde (Portland), Jim Prange (Seattle), Gene Petrescu (Missoula), Ted Buehner (Seattle), Barbara Mayes (NWSH Climate Services Division), Andy Haner (Seattle), Andrea Bair (WRH), and Tony Haffer (Phoenix).*

Several NWS Western Region staff participated in the 3<sup>rd</sup> annual WeatherFest that kicked off the January 11-15 AMS Annual Meeting in Seattle. Portland WCM Tyree Wilde and WRH PAO Marilu Trainor led the team which put together a comprehensive and hands-on NWS exhibit in the Seattle Convention Center. Nearly 1,000 people, many of them local school children and their parents, attended the WeatherFest.

As part of WeatherFest activities, WFO Seattle Incident Meteorologist (IMET) Jim Prange spoke to a group of Boy Scouts as part of their Meteorology Merit Badge project. Jim explained his duties, equipment, and responsibilities as an IMET

as well as a meteorologist and the challenges he faces when dealing with Pacific Northwest weather.

WFO Seattle partnered with University of Wisconsin meteorologists to provide twice-daily weather briefings. To assist with the graphical display of weather maps and model forecasts, the WFO used FX-NET developed by OAR/FSL. Designed for use by NWS IMETS when deployed to wild fires or hazardous materials incidents, the communications and display system gives the briefer a tool that is almost identical in feel and look to AWIPS D2D. A theme was presented at the beginning of each briefing. The themes ranged from the climate of the Pacific Northwest, to the NWS Interactive Forecast Preparation System (IFPS), to local high resolution deterministic and ensemble modeling efforts. Because FxNet replicates AWIPS, several NWS forecasters from the western United States that were attending the conference were able to comfortably assist WFO Seattle with the briefings.

Shelley Heaps (Equal Employment Manager, WRH) and Tony Haffer (MIC, Weather WFO Phoenix) met with students majoring in meteorology, atmospheric science, climatology, hydrology, etc., on the evening of January 10 at a student social sponsored by the American Meteorological Society (AMS) where they discussed employment opportunities with the National Weather Service (NWS). In addition, several Western Region employees staffed a NWS career information booth throughout the week during the AMS Conference.

**Great Job to WFOs Missoula, Great Falls, and Glasgow:** Congratulations to Missoula, Great Falls, and Glasgow for providing plenty of advance notice and warnings for severe winter conditions throughout much of northern Montana on January 26 and 27.

A strong Pacific storm system combined with the coldest arctic air mass of the season produced very heavy snow over portions of northern Montana. Particularly hard hit were the West Glacier and northern Flathead county regions in NW Montana and portions of NE Montana. From near the Continental Divide east, the snow was accompanied by very strong winds and arctic air, with blizzard conditions in large areas.

Twenty-four hour snowfall reports in NW Montana totaled up to 30 inches at elevations as low as 3500 feet, with one to two feet common. One to two feet of new snow was also reported in the higher elevations of north-central Montana. Lighter amounts of snow occurred in the plains, but strong winds created many areas of drifting snow.

Temperatures plummeted to 35 below zero near the Divide and into the -15 to -30 degree range on the plains. Wind chills were commonly below -35 on the plains in the afternoon on January 27. At 2:00 a.m. on January 27, Logan Pass in Glacier National Park had a temperature of 16 degrees and a west wind gusting to 56 mph; by 4:00 a.m., the temperature dropped to -36 degrees with an east wind at 27 mph, producing a wind chill of 73 degrees below zero.

Petroleum and Valley counties in NE Montana were declared disaster areas. Snow removal budgets depleted by earlier storms hampered road recovery efforts in NE Montana. All major roads and highways were closed in the West Glacier Region and Highway 2 was closed in northwest and north-central Montana.

Winter conditions were highlighted in the Hazardous Weather Outlooks and Special Weather Statements issued January 21 and 22, giving as much as 5 days of lead time. Winter Storm Watches were issued as early as January 24, most giving 24 to 48 hours lead time, some longer. Winter Storm Warnings issued Sunday gave from 12 to over 24 hours lead time. Some warnings were upgraded to Blizzard Warnings.

Besides normal forecast and warning operations, WFO staffs contacted many Sheriff and emergency management (EM) offices throughout the region long before the event began. WFO Great Falls contacted all state and county EM offices in the CWA Wednesday afternoon to advise of the upcoming abrupt end of a mild weather pattern to a bitter Arctic pattern.

Only a couple of days prior, a Pacific storm produced 1-2 feet of snow across the northern Rockies from January 23-26. Heavy snow closed Interstate 90 (main east-west travel corridor) across parts of Washington, Idaho, and Montana on January 25. In the city of Missoula, Montana, only emergency travel was allowed that afternoon due to the heavy snow. Lead times for Watches and Warnings were as much as 40 hours with an average warning lead time of 24 hours for the numerous warnings issued beginning on Saturday, January 24. The Warnings Coordination meteorologist at Missoula contacted all media and emergency managers on Friday afternoon, January 23, advising them of the heavy snows expected over the weekend. Numerous interviews were conducted by the Missoula staff during the event.

Great Job Montana!!

## AROUND THE REGION



*Rhett Milne, IMET and Fire Weather Program Leader at WFO Reno, is interviewed by an NBC affiliate in Tampa, FL.*

### **NWS Reno Participates in Operation Sierra Storm Conference:**

On January 20-22, NWS Reno participated in the 11<sup>th</sup> Annual Operation Sierra Storm Conference at Lake Tahoe. The conference brought TV and radio meteorologists from across the nation to learn about NOAA programs. Approximately 20 meteorologists attended. Some topics included the NWS Fire Weather Program, the NOAA Teacher at Sea Program, and information about lightning from the National Center for Atmospheric Research. Attendees also had an opportunity to conduct interviews and live shots at nearby ski resorts with a beautiful shot of Lake Tahoe in the background.



*WFO Boise CFC campaign co-chairpersons Jay Breidenbach and Susan Wines accepted the award.*

### **WFO Boise Receives Presidential Award for CFC**

**Campaign:** WFO Boise achieved Gold Award status and received the roving annual "Presidential Award" for participation in the Combined Federal Campaign in their area. The Gold Award is given to organizations that improved in percentage of employees participating, per-capita donations, and percentage increase in total contributions over the previous year. The award was presented to WFO Boise on January 23 at the Southwest Idaho Combined Federal Campaign Recognition Ceremony.

**WFOs Participate in Student Project:** Two WFOs are participating in JASON 2004, an international science project for middle and high school students. The project is partially sponsored by NOAA and gives students an opportunity to participate in hands-on experiments. NWS staff from Boise gave presentations to four groups on January 28 and 30, with an attendance of about 250. WFO Las Vegas is also participating in their local activities with attendance between 15,000 to 20,000 students and teachers.



*Tucson Hydrologist prepares transmitter mast for test shots for a prospective ALERT site.*

**WFO Tucson Searches for Stream Gage Site:** On January 14, 2004, Tucson hydrologist Mike Schaffner formed part of a party to search for a stream gage site along Alder Canyon. Alder Canyon emanates from the Bullock Fire burn area on the remote backside Santa Catalina Mountains. Several homes are endangered. The AZ Division of Emergency Management, AZ Division of Water Resources, USGS, and a local county flood plain representative were present.

## **METEOROLOGICAL SERVICES DIVISION**

**Getting to Know the Newest MSD Member:** Paul J. Hamilton recently joined the MSD team at WRH to assist with the fire weather program, including quality control.

His initial interest in meteorology began in high school when Hurricane Eloise hit Niceville, Florida, in September 1975. Paul received his undergraduate degree in meteorology at Florida State University (Go Seminoles!) in 1983. Next, Paul spent seven years in the U.S. Air Force as a weather officer, including work at the Air Force Avionics Laboratory in Dayton, Ohio, and later as Chief, Scientific Services Branch, Seventh Weather Wing, Scott AFB, Illinois. Paul completed a master's degree at Colorado State University in 1987 studying the dynamics of severe local storms. In 1990, he joined the NWS as an intern in Redwood City, California. Next, he moved to

NWS Reno as a fire weather meteorologist and was later promoted to a lead forecaster at WFO Monterey. More recently, Paul served as the NWS representative at the northern California fire center in Redding (2002-2003) and last year moved to WFO Sacramento to lead an intensive quality control effort of NWS fire weather forecasts for California. Paul enjoys traveling, history, hiking, card games, and kayaking.

**Statement of the Week:** A segment of a lengthy Winter Weather Message written by Laurie Koch, Gene Petrescu, Eric Boldt and Stan Krenz at WFO Missoula is included as Statement of the Week. This segment grabs the attention of customers immediately by starting with words, "life threatening conditions". Great teamwork, WFO Missoula!

URGENT - WINTER WEATHER MESSAGE  
NATIONAL WEATHER SERVICE MISSOULA MT  
400 PM MST (300 PM PST) TUE JAN 27 2004

MTZ002-280400-  
WEST GLACIER REGION-  
INCLUDING...SWAN LAKE

...A BLIZZARD WARNING CONTINUES FOR THE WEST GLACIER REGION  
THROUGH 9 PM TONIGHT...  
...WINTER STORM WARNING HAS BEEN ISSUED FOR THE WEST GLACIER  
REGION FROM 9 PM TONIGHT THROUGH 6 AM THURSDAY...

LIFE THREATENING CONDITIONS CURRENTLY EXIST DUE TO HEAVY SNOW  
AND VERY WINDY CONDITIONS REDUCING VISIBILITIES TO ZERO. EAST WINDS  
30 TO 40 MPH WITH GUSTS TO 50 MPH WILL CONTINUE THROUGH THIS  
EVENING. TOTAL SNOW ACCUMULATION OF 2 TO 4 FEET IN THE MOUNTAINS  
AND 1 TO 2 FEET IN THE VALLEYS ARE EXPECTED BY THIS EVENING. THESE  
STRONG WINDS AND COLD TEMPERATURES WILL RESULT IN WHITEOUT  
CONDITIONS AND WIND CHILL READINGS OF 30 TO 40 BELOW ZERO.

AFTER 9 PM THIS EVENING...SNOW WILL CONTINUE TO FALL...HEAVY AT TIMES  
WITH NEW SNOW ACCUMULATIONS OF 1 TO 2 FEET EXPECTED BY EARLY  
THURSDAY MORNING. THE VERY STRONG EAST WINDS WILL SUBSIDE THIS  
EVENING...THEN SWITCH TO WEST AT 15 TO 25 MPH THROUGH THURSDAY.  
AREAS OF BLOWING AND DRIFTING SNOW WILL PERSIST. THE WINTER STORM  
WATCH PREVIOUSLY IN EFFECT HAS BEEN UPGRADED TO THE WINTER  
STORM WARNING.

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**Spot Light on Digital Services:** Western Region Headquarters has recently announced the formation of Digital Services Teams composed of members of WFO management and Regional Headquarters personnel. The intent of these teams is to help manage the regional implementation of IFPS and related grid based forecast processes for at least the next 24 months. These teams will focus their efforts in addressing issues raised in the WR MIC OPS Concept paper as well as the recent national Digital Services meeting. There will be six teams to address the following



major areas: 1) Grid Quality, 2) Methodology/Coordination/Workload, 3) Dissemination and new Digital Products, 4) Formatters, 5) Outreach, and 6) Service Backup.

**Commercial Pilot Tours WFO Medford:** On January 13, a First Officer for SkyWest Airlines stopped by the NWS office in Medford and asked for a tour. Roger Williams (MIC) showed the pilot the operations area and also provided a brief overview of IFPS. Following the tour, he asked the pilot if he would consider providing feedback on Medford's TAFs whenever the opportunity presented itself in the future (i.e. for airports which Medford has TAF responsibility -- Klamath Falls, Medford, and North Bend). The tour went well, and before the pilot departed, he was asked to "spread the word" to his co-workers regarding the ready availability of Medford's operations staff anytime, day or night, as well as a reminder of the close proximity of the WFO Medford to the airport.

**WFO Medford Adds Telephone Line for Marine Forecasts:** WFO Medford recently implemented a new telephone number dedicated solely to Marine Forecasts. Callers now have a way to access marine forecasts from WFOs Medford, Eureka, and Portland. Additionally, the Offshore Forecast (issued by the NWS' Ocean Prediction Center for marine areas from 60 to 250 nautical miles from the coast) is also available. Marine forecasts for all these areas are now just one phone call away. This telephone marine forecast system was made possible by Darren Dixon (ESA at WFO Medford), with the assistance of Western Region Headquarters (Meteorological Services and Systems Operations Divisions). By using the "Interactive Voice Response" (IVR) system, callers access a phone tree from which they can select the desired marine forecast option. If anyone is interested in checking out this recording, the number is (541) 776-4305.

**WFO Glasgow Hosts "Cameo/Aloha/Marplot" Training Course in Eastern Montana:** WFO Glasgow, in partnership with the Valley County Local Emergency Planning Committee, completed a two-day "CAMEO/Aloha/Marplot" Training course. The course was conducted by the Environmental Protection Agency, Region VIII. It was attended by NWS staff members from WFOs Billings and Glasgow, local Disaster and Emergency Services Coordinators from several Montana counties, and local hazmat/emergency responders.

The course focused on the extensive CAMEO chemical database, which contains over 6,000 chemicals (and over 100,000 synonyms), Response Information Data Sheets (similar to Materials Safety Data Sheets), and reactivity worksheets, which allow users to evaluate potential consequences of combining various chemicals. Marplot (a compatible mapping program) was also demonstrated, employing local county maps, to familiarize users with the techniques of adding and updating "information layers" on these maps.

Finally, the group ran several scenarios through Aloha (a chemical dispersion model intended for use by first responders, and compatible with chemical information from CAMEO) to create predictive plume dispersion footprints, indicating aerial/time distributions of hazardous chemical concentrations. The data was then imported into Marplot to assist emergency responders with (simulated) evacuation decisions.

## SCIENTIFIC SERVICES DIVISION

**Advanced Warning Operations Course (AWOC):** The dates for the “train the trainer” portion of The Advanced Warning Operations Course have been set. All WFOs/RFCs are required to send the SOO/DOH or radar focal point to this one week course at the WDTB in Norman OK. WR course slots will be weighted toward the September course dates in case of another busy fire weather season. A formal call for WR WFO trainers to request their course week will occur in mid-February with a mid-March deadline. **WFOs should take this mandatory course into account when setting up their summer annual leave schedule over the next few months.** The AWOC course dates are:

August 3-5, 2004  
August 17-19, 2004  
August 24-26, 2004  
August 31-Sep 2, 2004  
Sep 14-16, 2004  
Sep 21-23, 2004

AWOC will provide updated radar training to all NWS forecasters in the fall and winter of 2004/2005.

**Western Region PD&T and Intern Progress Reports - Due April 15:** The semi-annual Western Region Professional Development and Training (PD&T) Report including the Intern Progress Report(s) is due on April 15, 2004.

**COMET Partners Projects:** The Cooperative Program for Operational Meteorology, Education, and Training (COMET) is accepting proposals for Partners Projects. The average Partners Project has been about \$7000 excluding those items directly funded by the NWS. Since Partners Project funds are limited, it is unlikely a proposal will be funded if its budget significantly exceeds the average. Additional information and submission requirements are available at:  
<http://www.comet.ucar.edu/outreach/part.htm>.

**NWSTC Fall Protection and Rescue Student Course Slots:** The list of Western Region students and their course dates for the NWSTC Fall Protection & Rescue Recertification and Attrition courses may be found at:  
[http://ww2.wrh.noaa.gov/ssd/WRFY04\\_TrngSlots.htm](http://ww2.wrh.noaa.gov/ssd/WRFY04_TrngSlots.htm)

**NAME Applications - Due March 1:** Planning has swung into high gear for the North American Monsoon Experiment (NAME). The Forecast Operations Center for NAME, which will be based at WFO Tucson, has issued a call for Forecasters who are willing and able to provide support during the Intense Operational Period in July and August of 2004. Updated details on the project can be found at <http://www.joss.ucar.edu/name>. Forecasters, interns, and students interested in applying should contact Erik Pytlak (SOO, WFO Tucson) at [erik.pytlak@noaa.gov](mailto:erik.pytlak@noaa.gov). Applications are due by March 1.

## **SYSTEMS OPERATIONS DIVISION**

**ASOS:** Kevin Bolton, ASOS RMS, visited the Butte, MT ASOS with several personnel from the Missoula Forecast Office. The trip was in response to complaints that the visibility sensor was reporting inaccurately. Kevin will be working with the local office on possibly relocating the DCP sensor array.

**NEW Safety Training for Safety Focal Points:** A Web-based Safety Refresher Course is being developed by Effective Answers, Inc (also developing a web page including on line registration). The Web-based Safety Courses are scheduled to start in May 2004. Five courses are proposed. The course will be offered every other year for the office focal points and every year for new focal points who have taken the initial Safety course at NWSTC. The schedule can be found on the NWSTC web site: <http://www.nwstc.noaa.gov/nwstrn/classes.html#SFTY-R>.